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Anne Brontë's Realist 'Bluebeard'

JESSICA CAMPBELL

Despite scholarly attention to the role of fairy tales in the novels of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, no one has discussed the possibility that 'realist' sister Anne deployed fairy tales as well. But the core plot of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* strikingly resembles 'Bluebeard'. The heroine of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* shares the essential predicament of Bluebeard's wife: marriage to a man whose past threatens her in the present. This essay argues that Anne Brontë's adult fiction, too, reflects the Brontës' childhood engagement with fairy-tale and fantasy literature — but in a subtle way that works in concert with her unflinchingly realist aims.

KEYWORDS Anne Brontë, 'Bluebeard', fairy tales, marriage, realism, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

An entry in Kate Beaton's recent *Hark! A Vagrant* comic sums up the prevailing attitude towards Anne Brontë's role in her family: while Charlotte and Emily ogle scowling men and imagine fantastic stories for them, Anne focuses on their alcohol bottles. Her sisters demur, but she insists, 'I'm just telling the truth!'.[1] Anne is considered the most realist of the Brontë sisters with good reason: neither *Agnes Grey* (1847) nor *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) contains anything like Rochester's miraculously transmitted call to Jane Eyre or the ghosts of *Wuthering Heights*. As a result, scholarly attention to the role of fairy tales in the novels of Charlotte and Emily has not extended to Anne. But *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, even as it plainly 'tells the truth' about marriage to Byronic alcoholics, strikingly resembles 'Bluebeard'. The youngest Brontë, too, was exposed to fairy tales and other supernatural literature as a child and participated in the family creation of the Gondal and Angria fantasy worlds. Understanding Anne Brontë's work in its own right must include accounting for her childhood exposure to and creation of non-realist literature. In this essay, I demonstrate that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* shares with 'Bluebeard' a fundamental kinship that does not conflict with Anne Brontë's unusual structure and unflinchingly realist aims. Rather, the classic fairy-tale portrayal of a disastrous marriage to and escape from a villain provides an ideal foundation for this complex and topical novel. Recognizing the relevance of 'Bluebeard' to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* contributes a new approach to the ongoing scholarly effort to enrich our understanding of the youngest Brontë's work; it also indicates that fairy tales so deeply penetrated nineteenth-century British culture that they shaped not only the works of fantasy aficionados like Charles Dickens but even a novel ostensibly free of all enchantment.

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Fairy tales are protean; as Maria Tatar's *Secrets Beyond the Door* (2004), Molly Clark Hillard's *Spellbound: The Fairy Tale and the Victorians* (2014), and Laurence Talairach-Vielmas's *Fairy Tales, Natural History and Victorian Culture* (2015) have recently shown, the influence of traditional fairy tales can be felt across texts of widely disparate genres, not only self-avowed fairy-tale retellings.[2] The prevalence of fairy tales in nineteenth-century England makes it necessary for us to consider their role in literary production as a whole, including that of realist novels. Hillard and Tatar discuss some novels, Tatar even a Brontë novel, but both disregard Anne Brontë.[3] A basic summary that characterizes both 'Bluebeard' and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, however, is easy to write. The heroine marries a rich man she does not know very well, suspecting that he has a chequered past but not knowing the extent of his faults until after the wedding. These faults include inappropriate behaviour with women from his past. Feeling increasingly threatened the more she understands the man she has married, the heroine turns to her family for refuge. Ultimately she survives, her husband dies, and she marries a nicer man.

The parallel is subtle; unlike Charlotte Brontë in *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* and *Shirley*, Anne Brontë does not explicitly name 'Bluebeard' or any other fairy tale. But she was as aware of fairy tales as her siblings were. The Brontës' childhood bookshelves included *Aesop's Fables* and *The Arabian Nights*.[4] Young Anne, too, heard beloved servant Tabitha Aykroyd's stories from local fairy lore and participated in the group construction of the fantasy worlds of Angria and Gondal; as late as 1840, she compares the title flowers in 'The Bluebell' to fairy gifts.[5] In February 1833, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which the Brontës read, featured an eighteen-page review of Ludwig Tieck's theatrical version of 'Bluebeard', including extensive excerpts from the play.[6] Even though Anne Brontë's adult writing carries few obvious traces of them, the fantastical stories she encountered and composed as a child would not have simply vanished from her mind.

'Bluebeard' began with Charles Perrault's 'La Barbe-Bleue' published in 1697 in *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*. It tends to be grouped with other tales of murderous suitors and husbands, including the English folktale 'Mr Fox' (referenced in both *The Faerie Queene* and *Much Ado About Nothing*) and two Brothers Grimm tales, 'Fitcher's Bird' and 'The Robber Bridegroom', the latter of which became available in English in Edgar Taylor's 1826 second volume of translations of the Grimms' *Kinder und Hausmärchen*.[7] In Perrault's tale, a young girl marries an older man who possesses great riches but sports an alarmingly blue beard. Bluebeard tells her that he must leave for a time, handing her his ring of keys and declaring the entire house at her disposal, save one chamber. If she enters that chamber, he says, while pointing out the key that unlocks it, she will suffer dire consequences. Naturally, she enters the chamber as soon as he leaves, and there she discovers the mutilated bodies of several previous wives. Shocked, she drops the key in a pool of blood and finds to her dismay that she cannot wipe it clean — for it is a magic key. The husband returns, sees the bloody key, and prepares to kill her. Fortunately, her brothers appear just in time to rescue her and kill Bluebeard. Liberated and wealthy, the heroine provides for her brothers and sister and remarries.

'Bluebeard' is a strange fairy tale. The usual fairy-tale cast of characters is askew, for one thing: the title character begins as the husband of the heroine but turns out to be the villain. The story commences with a marriage instead of leading towards one (although there is a modest recuperation of marriage when the heroine weds a second time). Pinpointing the moral is difficult; Perrault's tongue-in-cheek 'moralités' are not

intended as moral lessons at all, and the heroine ultimately marries a man who 'lui fit oublier le mauvais temps qu'elle avait passé avec la Barbe-bleue' ('made her forget the terrible time she spent with Bluebeard').[8] If she forgets, she cannot gain any wisdom from the experience. Perhaps the best clue to a moral of 'Bluebeard' is the correspondence between Bluebeard's behaviour and inner qualities and his threatening appearance. Supposedly, his blue beard 'le rendait si laid & si terrible, qu'il n'était ni femme ni fille qui ne s'enfuit de devant lui' ('made him so ugly and so terrifying that there was not a single woman or girl who did not flee from him').[9] Not a single woman or girl, that is, except the many who have already married him, like the wife in the story, for his riches. She reflects after enjoying his lavish festivities that perhaps he 'n'avait plus la barbe si bleue' ('did not have such a very blue beard after all').[10] Like the debonair manners of the wolf in Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood', Bluebeard's civilized accoutrements deflect attention from both his menacing-looking body and his beastly impulses long enough to entrap women.

Early in the eighteenth century, Perrault's tales were translated into English and found a wide audience in Britain. They joined a myriad of other fairy tales (Continental and home-grown) being propagated by the explosion of publishing for children in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; during the Brontës' childhood, fairy tales were so ubiquitous in gift book and chapbook form that it would have been difficult for an English child of any social class to miss them. 'Bluebeard', after the 1729 translation by Robert Samber, 'almost immediately broke out and headlined chapbooks on its own, or sometimes with one other tale'.[11] Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'Bluebeard' inspired pantomimes and other theatrical performances, including the successful *Blue Beard, or Female Curiosity!* (1798). Thanks to the omnipresence of 'Bluebeard' in Victorian Britain, it is explicitly mentioned in many novels from the period. Bluebeard-like (i.e. dangerous and grotesque) villains abound in Victorian fiction — Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Svengali in *Trilby*, briefly Eustace Macallan in *The Law and the Lady*, and Dracula, to name a few.

But 'Bluebeard' also seeped into nineteenth-century storytelling in subtler ways. Tatar suggests that the tale's harmony with Gothic literature facilitated this incursion: '"Bluebeard" entered literary culture in the aftermath of the Gothic vogue, shaping marriage plots in novels ranging from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* through Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* to the latest Harlequin Romance'.[12] Indeed, 'Bluebeard' can be seen as an extreme example of the common Gothic narrative of a heroine's entrapment with a dangerous, powerful man. Much scholarship has situated 'Bluebeard' in the context of the seventeenth-century prevalence of arranged marriages between strangers and death in childbirth; at that time, any young woman's marriage could seem as frightening as marriage to Bluebeard.[13] But although the fairy tale comments on a historically specific problem, it also provides

> a metaphorical enactment of the issues that arise in marriages between men with a past and young women without much life experience […] [For the current wife] the wives in the closet are the women who played a powerful role in her husband's past and who, additionally, have a real physical presence in the day-to-day routines of her own life.[14]

Clearly, this reading articulates the relevance of 'Bluebeard' to *Jane Eyre*, in which Jane must conquer the inequality between her and Rochester's pasts represented primarily by Bertha.[15]

Helen Huntingdon has the same problem, trying to fend off Arthur's mistresses Annabella, Miss Myers and probably several others. 'Bluebeard' can haunt any story of marriage, not only those explicitly featuring murder. Moreover, although the tale begins with 'Once upon a time […]' and reaches a happy ending, its otherwise unusual structure and dark content suit Anne Brontë's cautionary novel very well. 'Bluebeard' does not even feature any magic except for the key that, inexplicably, cannot be wiped clean of blood. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'s supernatural references are also sparse and negative. The religious supernatural appears occasionally, represented by the words 'demon', 'witch' and 'fiend'.[16] Like characters in many Victorian novels, two of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'s are 'spellbound' and 'disenchanted' (*TWH*, pp. 251, 322). Gilbert Markham uses the novel's only extensive supernatural imagery describing his first approach to Wildfell Hall:

> the gigantic warrior that stood on one side of the gateway, and the lion that guarded the other, were sprouted into such fantastic shapes as resembled nothing either in heaven or earth […] but to my young imagination, they presented all of them a goblinish appearance, that harmonized well with the ghostly legends and dark traditions our old nurse had told us respecting the haunted hall. (*TWH*, p. 23)

Wildfell Hall looks like a Gothic mansion, as its name suggests. But it fact it is Helen's safe haven from the true place of danger, the ordinary and innocuously named Grassdale. The novel's sole portrayal of an otherworldly atmosphere is deliberately misleading.

The approach to Anne Brontë's work as the opposite of all things fairy-tale is reasonable enough — if one has only the most typical mainstream fairy tales in mind. Langland contrasts *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* with *Jane Eyre* and 'fairy tale romance' by noting that Helen's development continues after she marries.[17] Indeed, while many fairy tales (and *Bildungsromane*) follow a rags-to-riches pattern, Helen possesses riches from beginning to end, suffers at the hands of wealthy men, and finally marries a man who contributes nothing financially.[18] *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* begins with familiar markers of a realist novel: a specific time ('autumn of 1827') and the noncommittal setting of '—shire'. Already we are not in the world of 'once upon a time', as the rest of the novel confirms. Although the story ends with marriage, another wedding occurs in the middle. Certainly, the diary-within-a-letter format separates the novel structurally from fairy tales and from many contemporary novels.

Above all, representing prosaic, unpolished reality was crucial to Anne Brontë, who all but borrowed Dickens's defiant 'IT IS TRUE' from the preface to *Oliver Twist*. Scholars often debate her intentions in writing *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* — an unresolvable issue, given how little of her personal writing remains.[19] Fortunately, the virulent reviews following *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*'s first edition prompted her to write a forceful preface to the second. The word 'coarse', representatively, appears in at least four reviews from 1848 and 1849, twice paired with 'brutal'.[20] The preface retorts, in the familiar language of nineteenth-century realism,

> my object in writing the following pages, was […] to tell the truth, for truth always conveys its own moral to those who are able to receive it […] when we have to do with vice and vicious

> characters, I maintain it is better to depict them as they really are than as they would wish to appear. (*TWH*, pp. 3, 4)

Anne Brontë's language brooks little doubt: whatever her other motives, one was to reveal the evils of substance abuse and the inordinate power men held in marriage.

Even a realist and topical novel, however, may draw for its basic story on a fairy tale; as a model for male abuse of power, one could do much worse than 'Bluebeard'. Helen's predicament is the same as that of Bluebeard's wife: she naively marries a man whose past becomes her primary problem in the present. Although Helen, already possessing a fortune, lacks the fairy-tale heroine's explicitly mercenary motivation, her uncle nonetheless notes Arthur Huntingdon's fortune in his favour (*TWH*, p. 136).[21] The two women's feelings towards their prospective husbands are quite different: Helen marries Huntingdon primarily because she is attracted to him. But they possess comparable amounts of knowledge about these men. Bluebeard's wife knows only that he has had several wives and that they have disappeared. Helen knows slightly more; her aunt constantly reminds her of Huntingdon's reputation as a 'profligate' (*TWH*, p. 149). Unlike Perrault's heroine, Helen discovers some of Huntingdon's callousness during their engagement. 'My cup of sweets is not unmingled', she writes in her journal, 'it is dashed with a bitterness that I cannot hide from myself, disguise it as I will […] I cannot shut my eyes to Arthur's faults […] His very heart […] is, I fear, less warm and generous than I thought' (*TWH*, p. 186). Helen cringes at Huntingdon's irreverent accounts of dissipation but insists on assuming the role of his moral guide.

Helen admits in the second paragraph of her first diary entry as Mrs Huntingdon that

> Arthur is not what I thought him at first […] if I had loved him first, and then made the discovery [of his true character], I fear I should have thought it my duty not to have married him. To be sure, I might have known him, for everyone was willing enough to tell me about him, and he himself was no accomplished hypocrite, but I was wilfully blind. (*TWH*, p. 202)

Huntingdon is less secretive than Bluebeard; Helen could have learned much more before marrying him. But she holds herself back from knowledge, as Perrault's heroine ludicrously decides that the wealthy man's beard is not *so* blue after all and asks nothing about the fate of her predecessors. Knowing just enough to fear that the full story would scare them away from what they want, both brides-to-be decline to pursue suspicious information about their prospective husbands.

After the weddings, the wives learn the husbands' most damning secrets — in both cases because the husbands choose to reveal them. Huntingdon's early transgressions against Helen are abandonment and betrayal — sins he has already committed against other women. Helen, calling these women his 'victims', writes that he frequently 'tell[s] me stories of his former amours, always turning upon the ruin of some confiding girl or the cozening of some unsuspecting husband; and when I express my horror and indignation, he lays it all to the charge of jealousy, and laughs' (*TWH*, p. 208). Although Huntingdon has not literally killed these women like Bluebeard, he still marries Helen with a past full of women he has ruined and discarded. Soon, he treats Helen as he treated them, having extramarital sex and habitually lying to Helen about when he plans to return from sojourns in London. As the years of marriage pass, Huntingdon's excessive drinking and subsequent misbehaviour worsen.[22]

Strangely, neither Bluebeard nor Huntingdon is actually as secretive as his behaviour warrants. Huntingdon is generally known to be a rake, and the inhabitants of Bluebeard's neighbourhood know that he has married several times and that those wives are unaccounted for. Moreover, Bluebeard's elaborate ritual of giving the new wife the key, pointing out the chamber, and going on a journey suggests that the serial marriages are designed as much to exhibit the corpses as to add a new one. Perrault offers no indication that Bluebeard is surprised or even particularly angry to come home to a bloody key; he raises his voice only from impatience, once his wife exceeds the fifteen minutes allotted to her to say her prayers. Huntingdon, meanwhile, laughs while telling Helen of his former conquests, carries on with Annabella in Helen's home, and finally brings his mistress Miss Myers to live there under the flimsy pretence of her working as governess to little Arthur. Both men abandon secrecy almost entirely once they are married, satisfied that their wives lack the physical and legal power to act on their fear or disapproval.

It may be objected to this parallel that 'Bluebeard', a 2,000-word fairy tale, flames out in a burst of violence quite quickly after the heroine's discovery of the corpses, whereas in Anne Brontë's realist novel the disastrous marriage dies a longer and less dramatic death. But although Huntingdon exerts no physical violence on Helen, he violates her property, her morals and her very identity. Technically, the first of those is no violation at all, because Huntingdon legally owns his wife's property. But the scene is striking for the scholar of 'Bluebeard' and could be taken as evidence that Anne Brontë intended to evoke the tale. Having seized Helen's diary and discovered her scheme for escape with little Arthur, Huntingdon demands her keys. 'What keys?' Helen replies. '"The keys of your cabinet, desk, drawers, and whatever else you possess," said he, rising and holding out his hand' (*TWH*, p. 365). He wrests the keys from her despite her refusal and confiscates the money, jewels and painting materials on which she had planned to live after escaping. Although Helen's 'transgression' is quite unlike that of Bluebeard's wife, both wives come to mirror their husbands' secretive behaviours. The violation of Helen's secret plan and goods leads not to a literal death sentence but to another nine months of life at Grassdale. Helen is well-nigh trapped with her husband despite possessing resources that many women at the time did not — upper-class status, profitable artistic skills, a sympathetic family member,[23] and even access to another house.

Worse is the moral violence done to Helen throughout the novel, primarily at the hands of Huntingdon. Both Gilbert Markham and Huntingdon's friend Hargrave bear some guilt for trying to persuade her into adultery before her husband's death — Helen refers to Hargrave in her diary as 'the enemy' when she realizes his intentions, long before he seizes her physically (*TWH*, p. 331). Huntingdon effectively entraps her in a corrupting environment, one she feels is 'turning [her] nature into gall' (*TWH*, p. 313). After Huntingdon, suspecting intrigue between Helen and Hargrave, subjects her to 'a volley of the vilest and the grossest abuse it was possible for the imagination to conceive or the tongue to utter', she reflects:

> Could I ever have imagined that I should be doomed to hear […] such things spoken […] by those who arrogated to themselves the name of gentlemen? And could I have imagined that I should have been able to endure it as calmly […] as I had done? A hardness such as this is taught by rough experience and despair alone. (*TWH*, pp. 359, 361)

Helen is shocked partly by the disconnection between gentlemanly social rank and gracious behaviour. The mid-nineteenth century saw much debate over whether economic status or chivalry mattered more to the definition of 'gentleman'; as the century progressed, the scales tipped in favour of the latter.[24] Meanwhile, cultural discussions about marital violence and divorce increasingly reflected awareness that lower-class men were not the only ones who beat their wives.[25] For Helen, though, even graver than the so-called gentlemen's misbehaviour is her own diminishing sensitivity to it. Her diary entries before her marriage indicate that she recognizes the challenge of reforming Huntingdon, but not the possibility of his negatively influencing her.

Helen fears only one thing more than the flagging of her moral fortitude; her 'greatest source of uneasiness' is the danger Huntingdon poses to little Arthur (*TWH*, p. 350). She flees Grassdale fearing not murder, but something worse from a Victorian perspective: Huntingdon, by pointing his son toward alcoholism, irreverence and general misbehaviour, threatens the boy's immortal soul. The mid-Victorian debates surrounding child-rearing are crucial to the novel, though outside the scope of my discussion.[26] Adding a child to the story exacerbates the immediacy of the problem in the 'Bluebeard' stories: the danger is not that the husband has dreadful secrets in his past, but that the character traits that led to those secrets remain a problem for the current wife now. Bluebeard cannot keep his secret from his current wife because it involves her. The condition of the past wives — murdered, replaced, turned into trophies — is always about to become the condition of the present wife. Helen, though, tolerates her husband's affair with Annabella but walks out when Huntingdon brings subsequent mistress Miss Myers into their home as governess to their child. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* amplifies the encroachment of the husband's past sins into the present by focusing the anxiety on the child, a representative of the future. The 'Bluebeard' problem of the current wife's excessive proximity to her predecessors thus folds into Anne Brontë's concern about poor child-rearing.

Helen agonizes partly because she takes seriously the nineteenth-century moral association between spouses. She feels implicated in the very sins she has endeavoured to prevent: 'I so identify myself with him […] feel for him as for myself; but I cannot act for him; and hence, I must be and am debased, contaminated by the union' (*TWH*, p. 262). A woman in the middle of the nineteenth century had no legal identity separate from that of her husband. Moral equivalence is more complicated, as the nearly contradictory statements on the subject in Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Wives of England* (1843) indicate. Early in this advice manual for women considering marriage, Ellis asserts,

> Human sympathy may do much to comfort, human advice to guide, and human example to encourage; but whether married or single […] we must all bear our own burdens […] and receive our own sentence at the bar of eternal judgment.[27]

This view is more forgiving than Helen's, emphasizing the predominance of individual responsibility. But Ellis advises later, 'and now, having thus loved your husband, and cast in your lot with his […] it is meet that you should love him to the last […] if others turn away repelled, there is the more need for such a man, that his wife should love him still'.[28] 'Cast in your lot' echoes Helen's attitude; although Ellis does not say that the husband's faults are equally the wife's, she insists on wife's responsibility to meet them with unconditional love. Graver faults require her not to distance herself from an immoral influence but to minister even more closely to the man who has driven away all other

acquaintances. Ultimately, Helen subscribes to a slightly more severe version of Ellis's approach. The problem of Bluebeard's wife — how to distance herself physically from her husband to avoid being murdered — becomes a nineteenth-century wife's complex dilemma of establishing the proper physical and moral distance from a contaminating husband.

What does this dilemma mean for Helen's second marriage? Critics disagree about Gilbert's worthiness; some emphasize his similarities to Huntingdon, others his gradual improvement. Some studies have considered Gilbert while analysing the formal narrative features of the text, particularly the frame letter attributed to him.[29] Since the 1840s, discussions weighing multiple Brontë novels have often boiled down to comparative analyses of their distinctive male characters.[30] Gilbert frequently appears in arguments about whether Anne Brontë intended *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* as a mocking response to *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, of whose dangerously captivating Byronic heroes she presumably disapproved.[31] Langland and Chitham agree that Huntingdon is designed to expose the unattractiveness of marriage to a Byronic hero in real life. As for Gilbert, Chitham argues that his many everyday faults (he is 'petty, self-centred, impulsive, short-sighted and insensitive') make him ultimately unlovable and not insufficiently distinguished from Huntingdon.[32] Langland sees *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* rather as 'a cautionary tale that exposes the foolish romance in the attraction of a Byronic hero like Huntingdon and finally rewards the heroine with a very ordinary gentleman farmer who has had the grace to learn humility'.[33] For her, Gilbert is imperfect enough to suit Anne Brontë's realism but a desirable choice because, unlike Huntingdon, he changes for the better under Helen's influence. Hornosty and Morse, too, emphasize that despite initial similarities to Huntingdon, Gilbert lets himself be taught.[34] In Pike's estimation, the crucial factor is obvious from the beginning: Gilbert's superiority to Huntingdon as a paternal figure for little Arthur.[35]

Ultimately, neither the distinctions nor the similarities between Helen's two husbands can be an accident on Anne Brontë's part. How we interpret the comparative worthiness of Gilbert depends not only on the husbands' traits but on whether we believe that Helen's judgement has improved — difficult to determine given that Gilbert recounts her second engagement. The 'Bluebeard' reading of the novel offers a tentatively optimistic answer. Perrault deems the second husband 'fort honnête' ('very decent', 'very honourable'); as noted above, he helps the heroine 'forget' her troubles with Bluebeard.[36] While this situation appears desirable (and is certainly preferable to the heroine's first marriage), it effaces the typical fairy-tale payoff of learning a lesson from misfortune. Gilbert, too, is undoubtedly a better option than Huntingdon. But although there is no suggestion that Helen literally forgets her first marriage, embarking on a second one under identical legal conditions is risky, especially given the similarities between Huntingdon and Gilbert. Anne Brontë offers an ultimately ambiguous ending in keeping both with her realist insistence on portraying a prosaic hero and (if not with the classic fairy-tale tradition more broadly) with the flippant and contradictory 'moralités' of 'Bluebeard' and Perrault's other tales.

To say that *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is intimately linked to 'Bluebeard' is not to diminish its realism. Rather, Anne Brontë repackages the core plot and concerns of the fairy tale using a style, scope, setting and topic appropriate to a Victorian realist novel. Like her sisters, she uses the fairy tale to further her fictional aims — a use that has gone unnoticed likely because she does not revel in the trappings of the fairy tale as they do. But 'Bluebeard' quietly underpins *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* nonetheless. This unexpected

affinity suggests that Anne Brontë's work may contain other subtle riches as yet undiscovered — and unlike Bluebeard's wife, we can expect only rewards for our curiosity.

Notes

[1] Kate Beaton, 'Dude Watchin' with the Brontës', *Hark! A Vagrant* (n.d., Comic #202), available at http://www.harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=202.

[2] Maria Tatar, *Secrets Beyond the Door* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Molly Clark Hillard, *Spellbound: The Fairy Tale and the Victorians* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2014); Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Fairy Tales, Natural History, and Victorian Culture* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[3] The study that comes closest to considering fairy tales in Anne Brontë's work is Russell Poole's 'Cultural Reformation and Cultural Reproduction Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *SEL*, 33.4 (Autumn 1993), 859–73, which briefly suggests that Gilbert Markham and Frederick Lawrence represent the 'functions' of Desire and Law for Helen in the tradition of Vladimir Propp's classic *Morphology of the Folktale*.

[4] Winifred Gérin, *Anne Brontë* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1959), p. 71.

[5] Anne Brontë, *The Poems of Anne Brontë*, ed. by Edward Chitham (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 74.

[6] 'Tieck's Bluebeard. A Dramatic Tale, in Five Acts', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, CCIV. xxxiii (February 1833), 206–23 (p. 207).

[7] Casie E. Hermansson, *Bluebeard: A Reader's Guide to the English Tradition* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p. 110.

[8] Charles Perrault, 'La Barbe-Bleue', *Contes de Perrault en vers et en prose* (Paris: Chronique des Lettres Françaises, 1928), 125–35, p. 135. This and all subsequent translations mine.

[9] Perrault, p. 125.

[10] Perrault, p. 126.

[11] Hermansson, p. 37.

[12] Tatar, p. 8.

[13] See Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994) and *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge, 2006) for the relevance of arranged marriage to the early, seventeenth-century versions of 'La Belle et la bête' and 'Riquet à la Houppe' respectively.

[14] Tatar, p. 66.

[15] See discussion of the relationship between *Jane Eyre* and 'Bluebeard' in Tatar and the following: Victoria Anderson, 'Investigating the Third Story: "Bluebeard" and "Cinderella" in *Jane Eyre*', in *Horrifying Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature*, ed. by Ruth Bienstock Anolik (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), pp. 111–21; Heta Pyrhönen, *Bluebeard Gothic:* Jane Eyre *and its Progeny* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Phyllis Ralph, '"Beauty and the Beast": Growing Up with Jane Eyre', in *Approaches to Teaching Brontë's* Jane Eyre, ed. by Diane Long Hoeveler and Beth Lau (New York: MLA, 1993), pp. 56–61; and Karen E. Rowe, '"Fairy-born and Human-bred": Jane Eyre's Education in Romance', in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, ed. by Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 69–89.

[16] See Anne Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), pp. 419, 14, 183, 106, 109, 401, 422; hereafter *TWH*.

[17] Elizabeth Langland, *Anne Brontë: The Other One* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 52.

[18] Another way to look at the novel, though, is as a rags-to-riches story for Gilbert. He is not exactly in 'rags' before marrying Helen, but nonetheless his story can be seen as a quest narrative in which he successfully wins the 'princess' and access to her wealth. Because of the length and substance of the middle portion of the novel dominated by Helen's diary (and entirely lacking Gilbert), I do not believe this narrative is primary for Anne. But it runs interestingly alongside the 'Bluebeard' narrative.

[19] Biographer Edward Chitham gives this account: 'We have five of her letters, though we know she wrote hundreds. She may have kept a journal or diary, but if so, it has not survived. Two of her "journal papers" […] have been printed, but the manuscripts have been lost […] None of her juvenilia has survived: her earliest known poem dates from 1836, when Anne was sixteen, though all the Brontës wrote from a very young age.' See Edward Chitham, *A Life of Anne Brontë* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 5.

[20] See the unsigned reviews in *Literary World*, *Spectator*, and *Sharpe's London Magazine*, all in *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Miriam Allott (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1974), pp. 249–50, 257–61, 263–65. See also Charles Kingsley, 'Recent Novels', review from *Fraser's Magazine,* in *Critical Assessments of the Brontë Sisters*, II, ed. by Eleanor McNees (Robertsbridge, UK: Helm Information Ltd, 1996), 454–58.

[21] Perrault's heroine is the daughter of a 'dame de qualité' ('woman of quality', p. 125), though subsequent versions of the story have often decreased her social standing, surely in order to better explain her choice to marry Bluebeard.

[22] Compare Mary Wollstonecraft's *Maria: Or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1797), a possible inspiration for *Wildfell Hall* (see discussion in Langland). Although Wollstonecraft focuses less on alcoholism than Anne Brontë does, her preface offers a similar purpose of

shedding light on problems with marriage. Maria, like Helen, falls in love with a man whom she marries despite his frivolity, learns after marriage the extent of his faults, is abused by him, leaves him, and gets into trouble for having left him since the law is on his side. Wollstonecraft, too, emphasizes her story's realism, distinguishing it in the very first sentence from the Gothic tales in vogue at the time. Still, as Mary Summers points out in *Anne Brontë: Educating Parents* (Beverley, UK: Highgate Publications Ltd, 2003), Anne Brontë had more in common on the whole with the devout Hannah More. Whereas Wollstonecraft seems primarily concerned (as her novel's title indicates) with revealing the systemic injustice towards women in marriage, More emphasizes the Christian duties of men and women throughout her writing. Summers suggests More's novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808) as an inspiration for Anne Brontë, due to its focus on proper traits of husbands and wives. See Summers, pp. 95–118.

[23] Like Bluebeard's last wife, Helen escapes with the help of her brother. Frederick Lawrence functions in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* both to escalate Gilbert's desire for Helen and to rescue his sister from the monstrous husband — albeit through less dramatic means than running him through with a sword as the fairy-tale brothers do.

[24] See Robin Gilmour's *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981); for nineteenth-century commentary, see Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help*, published in 1859.

[25] See Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000); A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (London: Routledge, 1992); and J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[26] See Neil Hayward Cocks, 'The Child and the Letter: Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*,' *Textual Practice*, 27.7 (December 2013), 1125–47; and Judith E. Pike, 'Breeching Boys: Milksops, Men's Clubs and the Modelling of Masculinity in Anne Brontë's *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Brontë Studies*, 37.2 (April 2012), 112–24.

[27] Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Wives of England* ((New York: J. & H. Langley, 1843), p. 14.

[28] Ellis, p. 49.

[29] For further discussion of the novel's structure, see Maggie Berg, '"Let me have its bowels then": Violence, Sacrificial Structure, and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 21.1 (2012), 20–40; Jan B. Gordon, 'Gossip, Diary, Letter, Text: Anne Brontë's Narrative Tenant and the Problematic of the Gothic Sequel', *ELH*, 51.4 (Winter 1984), 719–45; and N. M. Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *The Brontës*, ed. by Patricia Ingham (London: Pearson Education Ltd, 2003), pp. 216–33.

[30] Charlotte Brontë herself participated, comparing Rochester, Huntingdon and Heathcliff in this letter written to William Smith Williams on 14 August 1848: the foundation of each character [Rochester and Huntingdon] is entirely different. Huntingdon is a specimen of the naturally selfish sensual, superficial man whose one merit of a joyous temperament only avails him while he is young and healthy, whose best days are his earliest, who never profits by experience, who is sure to grow worse, the older he grows. Mr Rochester has a thoughtful nature and a very feeling heart; he is neither selfish nor self-indulgent; he is ill-educated, misguided, errs, when he does err, through rashness and inexperience: he lives for a time as too many other men live — but being radically better than most men he does not like that degraded life, and is never happy in it. He is taught the severe lessons of Experience and has sense to learn wisdom from them — years improve him — the effervescence of youth foamed away, what is really good in him remains — his nature is like wine of a good vintage, time cannot sour — but only mellows him. Such at least was the character I meant to portray.

Heathcliff, again, of 'Wuthering Heights' is quite another creation. He exemplifies the effects which a life of continued injustice and hard usage may produce on a naturally perverse, vindictive and inexorable disposition. Carefully trained and kindly treated, the black gipsy-cub might possibly have been reared into a human being, but tyranny and ignorance made of him a mere demon. The worst of it is, some of his spirit seems breathed through the whole narrative in which he figures: it haunts every moor and glen, and beckons in every fir-tree of the 'Heights'. See Juliet Barker, *The Brontës: A Life in Letters* (London: Viking, 1997), p. 203.

[31] Parallels with *Wuthering Heights* are the most obvious: like Emily's novel, Anne's is named after one of its central locations (initials W. H.), features an abusive central male figure, and teems with male characters whose names begin with H. Although the first two elements apply to many novels, the profusion of H-names is unlikely to be a coincidence. As for *Jane Eyre*, critics compare the chequered pasts of Huntingdon and Rochester, as well as the heroines' flights from and returns to these men.

[32] Chitham, pp. 142–43.

[33] Langland, p. 58.

[34] Janina Hornosty, 'Let's Not Have its Bowels Quite so Quickly, Then: a Response to Maggie Berg', *Brontë Studies*, 39.2 (April 2015), 130–40; Deborah Denenholz Morse, '"I speak of those I do know": Witnessing as Radical Gesture in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, ed. by Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 103–26 (p. 121).

[35] Pike, pp. 119–22.

[36] Perrault, p. 135.

Notes on contributor

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